

# U.S. Army Europe

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2009: THE YEAR OF THE NCO

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## U.S. Army Europe NCOs honored for efforts in mentoring, educating Soldiers

By Staff Sgt. Patricia Deal

U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs Office

**HEIDELBERG, Germany --** His first “classroom” was a few Soldiers meeting under an overhang at a forward operating base in Iraq. The next time a few more came with some scrap wood for makeshift tables. The next time even more came, many bringing their own chairs.



STAFF SGT PATRICIA DEAL

Sgt. Maj. of the Army Kenneth O. Preston (left) presents the 2009 Strickland Educational Leadership Award to 1st Sgt. John Gutierrez of U.S. Army Europe's 9th Engineer Battalion during the Association of the United States Army's annual conference in Washington, D.C., Oct. 6. The award is presented each year to NCOs for their efforts in educating and mentoring future leaders. Gutierrez and Sgt. 1st Class Lumanai Snow, who was assigned to USAREUR's 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment at the time she was selected for the award, were two of just three Soldiers from across the Army to earn this year's award.

Ultimately, 1st Sgt. John Gutierrez's educational outreach went from just over 30 students a month to almost 200. They now meet in solidly built structures for lunchtime, dinnertime and evening classes.

“It was all because Soldiers wanted to learn,” Gutierrez said. “No matter where they are, no matter how many hours they work, they can manage to make time for their education.”

And as long as they want to learn, Gutierrez wants to teach Soldiers. Gutierrez, first sergeant for Schweinfurt, Germany's Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 9th Engineer Battalion, is currently deployed to Iraq with the 172nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team. “Nothing gives me greater satisfaction than to have a Soldier come back to me and say, ‘Hey, first sergeant, you know what you taught me in your class? It really does work,’” he said.

As an employee of Central Texas College, Gutierrez was instrumental in growing the educational program in his area from a handful of students to hundreds, from one class a month to nine, from one instructor to nine.

For his efforts in bringing education to the Soldiers, Gutierrez was awarded the 2009 Strickland Educational Leadership Award Oct. 6 during the Association of the United States Army's annual conference in Washington, D.C.

Gutierrez, one of three NCOs selected for the SELA Armywide, flew in from Iraq to receive his award. Another U.S. Army Europe Soldier, Sgt. 1st Class Lumanai Snow was also selected. Snow served as the personnel NCO-in-charge of the 2nd Stryker Cavalry Regiment's Regimental Support Squadron in Vilseck, Germany, and is currently en route to her new duty station in Hawaii.

The SELA is awarded each year to NCOs who exemplify the Army's vision of shaping future leaders through education and mentorship, said Command Sgt. Maj. (Ret.) Jimmie Spencer, AUSA's director of NCO and support programs.

The SELA honors the memory of Sgt. Maj. Larry L. Strickland, a victim of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the Pentagon. Strickland had served as the sergeant major for the Army's office of the deputy chief of staff for personnel.

"It truly is an honor to receive this award. I have been fortunate in my career to have leadership who emphasized the importance of education to me, and I want to pass that along to other Soldiers," Gutierrez said. "I really believe that the Soldier who goes to school, who studies hard, who continues to learn, is the Soldier who is going to achieve great success."



About us: The U.S. Army in Europe, with NATO and other coalition partners from throughout its 51-country area of responsibility, trains for, conducts, and supports contingency operations. Headquartered in Heidelberg, Germany, USAREUR has forces throughout Germany as well as in Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Romania, and in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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